



What Railroad Retirement Beneficiaries Should Know About Medicare Prescription Drug Plans

Railroad retirement beneficiaries who currently have Medicare Part A and/or Part B can first join a Medicare prescription drug plan between November 15, 2005, and May 15, 2006. In most cases, if you do not join during this period, your next chance to join will be between November 15, 2006, and December 31, 2006, and you may have to pay a penalty. This means you will pay a higher monthly premium for as long as you have Medicare prescription drug coverage.

- The Railroad Retirement Board **can provide information about the organizations that are available to help you** make choices about enrolling in a Medicare prescription drug plan.
- The Railroad Retirement Board **cannot provide advice or help you choose** which prescription drug plan is best for you.

Where you can get help making decisions on enrolling in a Medicare prescription drug plan

You can **call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227)** to get help making decisions on enrolling in a Medicare prescription drug plan. If you are deaf or hard of hearing, you can call the toll-free TTY number at 1-877-486-2048.

You can also **visit www.medicare.gov** on the Internet and use the following tools:

- **Compare Medicare Prescription Drug Plans** - This tool allows you to enter personalized information so that you can find and compare the prescription drug plans in your area that meet your personal needs. You can also use this tool to enroll in the prescription drug plan that you select.
- **Formulary Finder** - This tool allows you to enter information about the specific medications you take, and to find the plans in your area that match your prescription drug needs.

You can also **call your State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP)** for help. The telephone number for your state's SHIP is in your **Medicare & You 2006** handbook. You can also call 1-800-MEDICARE or your nearest Railroad Retirement Board office to get the telephone number of your SHIP.

Factors to consider when comparing Medicare prescription drug plans

- **Coverage** - Medicare drug plans will cover generic and brand-name drugs. Most plans will have a formulary, which is a list of drugs covered by the plan. This list must always meet Medicare's requirements, but it can change when plans get new information.
- **Cost** - Monthly premiums and your share of the cost of your prescriptions will vary depending on which plan you choose. You may be eligible for extra help with these costs if you have limited income and resources.
- **Convenience** - Medicare prescription drug plans must contract with pharmacies in your area. Check with the plan to make sure the pharmacies in the plan are convenient to you. Many plans will also offer mail order prescription services.
- **Security** - Even if you do not take a lot of prescription drugs now, you should consider joining a drug plan in 2006. For most people, joining now means you will pay your lowest possible monthly premium. If you do not join a plan by May 15, 2006, and you do not currently have a drug plan that, on average, covers at least as much as standard Medicare prescription drug coverage, you will have to wait until November 15, 2006, to join. When you do join, you will have to pay a higher monthly premium. You will pay a higher monthly premium for as long as you have Medicare prescription drug coverage.

What if you already have prescription drug coverage

If you already have prescription drug coverage from your (or your spouse's) former or current employer or union, you may not need to join a Medicare prescription drug plan. Check with your plan benefits administrator or insurer before making any changes. If your current coverage is at least as good as the Medicare standard prescription drug coverage:

- You can keep it as long as it is still offered by the employer or union; and
- You won't have to pay a penalty if the employer or union stops offering the coverage and you join a Medicare drug plan within 63 days after the coverage ends – even if you join after May 15, 2006.

If you already have prescription drug coverage through a Medicare private health plan or other insurance, check with your current plan to see if your coverage is changing.

Extra help for people with limited incomes and resources

Many people with limited income and resources will get extra help paying for their Medicare drug plan's monthly premiums, the yearly deductible, and prescription co-payments. If you are in this group, you should have already received information from the Social Security Administration (SSA) or from Medicare telling you what to do.

If you didn't get a notice or an application from SSA or Medicare but you think you qualify for extra help, call SSA at 1-800-772-1213 or visit www.socialsecurity.gov on the Internet.

How to join a Medicare prescription drug plan

You can join a Medicare prescription drug plan in the following ways:

- **By paper application** – Contact the company offering the drug plan you choose and ask for an application. Once you fill out the form, mail or fax it back to the company.
- **On the plan's website** – Visit the drug plan company's website. You may be able to join online.
- **On Medicare's website** – You will be able to join a drug plan at www.medicare.gov on the Internet using Medicare's online enrollment center.
- **By calling 1-800-MEDICARE** – You can join a drug plan by calling 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227) and talking to a Medicare customer service representative.

The Railroad Retirement Board does not have application forms and cannot help you join a Medicare prescription drug plan.

How you can pay monthly Medicare drug plan premiums

In most cases you will be able to pay your monthly Medicare drug plan premiums by one of the following methods:

- You can give permission to the company that offers the Medicare drug plan to deduct the premium automatically from your bank account, or
- You can pay the prescription drug plan directly by mailing them a check or money order each month.

In the future you will be able to choose to have your monthly premiums deducted from benefits you receive from the Railroad Retirement Board (RRB). Although this payment option is not yet available to railroad retirement beneficiaries and individuals who are paid their Social Security benefits by the RRB, this does not affect your eligibility to enroll in a Medicare prescription drug plan.